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# Assessing Violence in the Community:

## A Handbook for the Workplace

SASKATCHEWAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
**SAFE WORKPLACES**  
IN HEALTH



## **Assessing Violence in the Community: A Handbook for the Workplace**

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## Preface

Public Services Health and Safety Association (PSHSA) supports the prevention and reduction of workplace injuries and occupational diseases in Ontario's health care sector by assisting organizations to adopt preventive best practices and approaches. The purpose of this booklet is to provide assessment tools, tips and guidelines for use by the employer, supervisor and workers, to minimize the risk of violence when working in the community.

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## Introduction

Violence in the workplace is a growing issue in the healthcare and community care sector. Four types of workplace violence are recognized:

- Type I - External perpetrator: The violent person has no relationship to the worker or workplace
- Type II - Client or Customer: The violent person is a client at the workplace who becomes violent toward a worker or another client
- Type III - Employment-related: The violent person is an employee or past employee of the workplace
- Type IV - Domestic Violence: The violent person has a personal relationship with an employee or a client

Those who work in the community are at particular risk for all types of violence due to unpredictability of the environment and having to travel within the community. It is critical that employee safety is considered a priority and that appropriate assessments of the client, community and environment are conducted to recognize and control potential hazards.

This booklet provides practical tools to assess the risk for violence for those who work in the community, along with useful tips and guidelines to address the risks. This booklet outlines:

- Elements of a pre-visit assessment
- Elements of a pre-travel assessment
- An employee hazard checklist to be used in the community

Each of the assessment tools should be further tailored to the organization and work environment. To use this handbook effectively, organizations should begin by using the assessment tools. If a concern is identified, reviewing the suggested guidelines and tips provided at the end of the handbook will help determine control measures to eliminate the hazard or reduce associated risks.

## **Purpose of a Risk Assessment Tool**

The up-front planning that a community care organization and the care provider completes for the provision of care to clients in the community is critical to ensuring employee safety. Elements that should be considered in the planning include:

- Assessment of a client and home prior to a visit
- Assessment of the geographical region and travel route
- Assessment of the environment and client during the visit

All concerns and subsequent planned approaches should be documented and communicated, because consistency is important to minimize risk. Front-line staff must also continue to reassess risk, as a regular part of their daily work regimen, while working in the community. Also, reporting processes should be established by the organization to deal with risks when they are identified. A sample Worker Home/Community Risk Assessment Tool is included in this booklet.

## Assessment of a Client and Home Prior to a Visit

Before assigning a health care worker to a home visit, a supervisor or case manager should arrange a phone interview with the prospective client and/or a family member to complete a Pre-visit Assessment and plan time to assess the site, or area for potential violence hazards and risks. The evaluation should not only cover the physical environment, but should determine verbal patterns or behavioural cues that would indicate a risk of violent or aggressive behaviour. Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the supervisor has the responsibility to inform workers of any hazards identified in the workplace and to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect their health and safety.

The employer should ensure that a process is in place to conduct a pre-visit assessment and that the information gathered is given to the care provider so that safe approaches can be put into place. This process should clearly identify:

- Who will conduct the pre-visit assessment?
- Will the assessment be conducted in person or over the phone?
- Where will the information gathered be documented and maintained?
- How will this information be communicated to care providers?

Use the following pre-visit assessment tool as a guide for interviewing the client and/or family member(s) of the client. Read through each assessment item and answer the question with a 'yes' or 'no'. A 'yes' response indicates an elevated risk and an appropriate control measure should be considered. Document the action you will take in the column on the right.

Refer to the Risk Specific Guidelines and Tips section in this handbook for additional hazard control solutions. Share the completed form with workers and clearly communicate risk factors and precautions to be taken.

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Pre-Visit Assessment Tool			
<i>Sample questions to ask during the phone interview</i>			
Risk Identification	Y/N	Notes	Risk-specific Tips
Is the client or any other person in the home resistant to the visit?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	<a href="#">A1: Communicating with Potentially Violent Clients</a> <a href="#">A2: Terminating an Interaction with an Angry Client</a>
Is there a history of violent or aggressive behaviour by the client or other persons in the home – e.g. restraining orders against anyone in the household?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>  <i>*If yes, advise relevant staff and ensure Violence Assessment Tool AT is completed at first contact with client (Refer to SASWH Individual Client Risk Assessment Toolkit as needed.)</i>	Click here to enter text.	<a href="#">A3: Guidelines for Non-verbal Behaviour and Communications</a> <a href="#">A4: Guidelines for Telephone Threats</a> <a href="#">D2: Tips for when a Weapon is Involved</a> <a href="#">E1: Point-of-care Staff Work Practice Assessment</a> <a href="#">E2: Client Aggression Risk Factors</a> Click here to enter text.
Does the client have any medical conditions that may predispose them to violent or aggressive behaviour – e.g. head injury, substance abuse, or cognitive impairment?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	

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<p>Is the client presenting verbal patterns or behavioural cues which may indicate a risk of violent or aggressive behaviour – e.g. confused, boisterous, uttering threats, agitated, suspicious, intoxicated, and / or making socially inappropriate comments?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>*If yes, advise relevant staff and ensure VAT is completed at first contact with client (Refer to SASWH Individual Client Risk Assessment Toolkit as needed.)</i></p>	<p>Click here to enter text.</p>	
<p>Is or was the violent or aggressive behaviour directed toward a specific person or group of persons?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Click here to enter text.</p>	
<p>Will the person(s) whom the violent or aggressive behaviour is directed toward be present during the home visit?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>*If yes, advise relevant staff and ensure VAT is completed at first contact with client (Refer to SASWH Individual Client Risk Assessment Toolkit as needed.)</i></p>	<p>Click here to enter text.</p>	
<p>Have threats recently been made against the client? If so, who has made these threats?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Click here to enter text.</p>	

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Are firearms or other dangerous weapons kept in the home?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	
Are there pets or animals in the home?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	

## Assessment of the Geographic Region and Travel Route

Taking the time to assess the geographic region that the worker will be entering and travel route they will be taking is another proactive way of keeping workers safe. Some of this information can be gathered from the local police. Much of the information can only be gathered by conducting a site visit.

The supervisor should:

- Identify the safest route for the worker to reach the client's premises
- Check with the local police department to determine the crime rate for the geographic location. If the crime rate is considered high, have two workers travel together to provide care.

Use the following pre-travel assessment tool as a guide. Answer the questions in the following sections below. A "no" response indicates elevated risk and appropriate control measures should be considered.

Refer to the Risk Specific Guidelines and Tips section in this handbook for additional hazard control solutions. Share the completed form with workers and clearly communicate risk factors and precautions to be taken.

PRE-TRAVEL ASSESSMENT TOOL			
<i>Checklist to be completed by supervisor before the worker conducts the initial home visit</i>			
TRAVEL ROUTE			
Risk Identification	Y/N	Suggested Controls	Risk-Specific Tips
Has the safest route to get to the client been identified?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instruct worker to make sure the vehicle windows are closed and all vehicle doors are locked</li> <li></li> </ul>	<a href="#">B1: Planning Travel</a> <a href="#">B2: Travelling by Public Transit</a> <a href="#">B3: Walking in the Community</a>
Has the crime rate for the location been determined through the local police department?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.
Is the client aware of the approximate time of arrival?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	
PARKING AREA			
Risk Identification	Y/N	Suggested Controls	Risk-Specific Tips
Has the closest and safest parking spot been located?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	<a href="#">C1: Travelling by Car</a> <a href="#">C2: Safe Driving Practices</a> <a href="#">C3: What to Do If Confronted by an Aggressive Driver</a> <a href="#">C4: Parking Your Vehicle</a>
Do street lamps provide enough light for walking from the parked car or bus route to the entrance, and is there a light in the entrance to the building/home?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid scheduling night visits if possible</li> <li>Advise worker to park under a streetlight if arriving in the late afternoon or at night</li> <li></li> </ul>	Click here to enter text.

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Is the entrance visible from the road?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	
INSIDE/OUTSIDE OF DWELLING			
Risk Identification	Y/N	Suggested Controls	Risk-Specific Tips
Has the area been mapped out for potential perpetrator hiding spots (e.g. behind bushes or hedges)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	<a href="#">B1: Planning Travel</a> <a href="#">D1: Personal Attack Tips</a> <a href="#">D2: Tips for When a Weapon is Involved</a> Click here to enter text.
Are there any physical hazards (barriers, broken steps, free-roaming dogs, weapons) and, if so, is there a plan for controlling these hazards during the visit?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request that the entry area light be on, if there is one</li> <li>• Provide worker with a flashlight if needed</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
If there is a possibility of encountering hazards during the visit, have arrangements been made for a pre-visit and post-visit call to the office, a nurse, the supervisor or, if possible, a “buddy”?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	
Will other people be in the residence during the visit? If so, do you know how many, what their relationship to the client is, whether there any potential for violence, and who will open the door?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	

EMERGENCY EGRESS			
Risk Identification	Y/N	Suggested Controls	Risk-Specific Tips
Does the worker know where the nearest telephone is? Are there emergency phones or pull stations in the building, housing or parking complex?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage worker to carry a cell phone pre-programmed with emergency contact numbers</li> <li></li> </ul>	<a href="#">A2: Terminating an Interaction with an Angry Client</a> <a href="#">C5: Returning to your Vehicle</a> Click here to enter text.
Are there uneven surfaces that might impede a quick exit by the worker?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Click here to enter text.	
Has the worker determined the safest route for returning to their vehicle?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure worker is aware to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be observant! Look and listen</li> <li>Avoid slinging purse or bag over shoulder or around neck</li> <li>Carry your keys in your hand</li> <li>Walk around vehicle, and check back seat before unlocking car</li> <li>Lock doors, keep windows up until underway</li> <li></li> </ul>	

Pre-visit and Pre-travel assessments should ideally be completed within 24 hours before the initial home visit, then followed by a behaviour assessment such as Violence Assessment Tool completed at the beginning of each home visit thereafter – refer to SASWH Individual Client Risk Assessment Toolkit as needed.

## Employee Hazard Assessment Tool

With information gathered from the pre-visit and pre-travel assessments, a number of controls should already be in place. However, front-line staff must continue to assess risk as a regular part of their daily work routine. Observation and communication skills are very important when assessing and minimizing risk. Any findings that deviate from what has been deemed acceptable should be immediately reported by the worker, following the reporting procedures established at the organization.

[A worker home/community assessment tool is provided in this handbook as a guide.](#)

Each organization should customize this tool to suit their needs. For instance, specific instructions can be included under the yes/no columns, with directions to the worker that match the organization's policy and procedures.

# Home/Community Hazard Assessment Tool

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS			
Risk Factors	Y/N	Suggested Controls	Risk-Specific Tips
Has the closest and safest parking spot been located?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Proceed to the home <input type="checkbox"/> No - Call supervisor in case of emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure the vehicle windows are closed and all vehicle doors are locked</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<a href="#">B1: Planning Travel</a> <a href="#">B3: Walking in the Community</a> <a href="#">C4: Parking Your Vehicle</a> <a href="#">C5: Returning to Your Vehicle</a>  Click here to enter text.
Is entrance visible from the road?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Proceed to the home <input type="checkbox"/> No - Call supervisor in case of emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map the area prior to visit for potential perpetrator hiding spots (e.g. behind bushes or hedges)?</li> <li>• Turn on high beams if necessary</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
Is neighbourhood well lit?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Proceed to the home <input type="checkbox"/> No - Have phone ready to call 911 if necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel in daylight hours whenever possible</li> <li>• Turn on high beams if necessary</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
Is the path from the parking spot to the front door well lit?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Proceed to the home <input type="checkbox"/> No - Have phone ready to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request client/family install adequate exterior lighting and/or repairs</li> <li>• Ask that entry area light be on prior to visit</li> </ul>	

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	call 911 if necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a flashlight if needed</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
Have driveways, paths and stairs been cleared to allow a worker to exit quickly if needed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Proceed to the home <input type="checkbox"/> No - Call supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask client/family clear driveways, paths and stairs</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
Are there any uneven surfaces that might impede a quick exit by the worker?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Slow down and call supervisor <input type="checkbox"/> No - Proceed to the home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask client repair uneven surfaces</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
Is there a long approach to the road?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Call supervisor in case of an emergency <input type="checkbox"/> No - Proceed to the home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map the area before visiting the home</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
Has the safest route for returning to the vehicle been determined?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Proceed to the vehicle <input type="checkbox"/> No - Call supervisor in case of an emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry your keys in your hand</li> <li>• Do not sling your purse or bag over your shoulder or around your neck</li> <li>• Walk around vehicle, and check back seat before unlocking car</li> <li>• Lock doors, keep windows up until underway</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	

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COMMUNICATION ACCESS			
Risk Factor	Y/N	Suggested Controls	Risk-specific Tips
Is there access to a telephone, cell phone, reception or 911 communication?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Proceed with client care <input type="checkbox"/> No - Find nearest phone and contact supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a method of summoning immediate help e.g. carry a cell phone with automatic dial to 911 &amp; /or personal safety alarm device</li> <li>Follow any “working alone” precautions required</li> <li></li> </ul>	<a href="#">B1: Planning Travel</a> Click here to enter text.
PETS/ANIMALS			
Risk Factor	Y/N	Suggested Controls	Risk-specific Tips
Are there any animals in the home?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Consider anything that may affect staff safety and delivery of care <input type="checkbox"/> No - Proceed with client care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask client/family to secure pets prior to visit as necessary</li> <li></li> </ul>	Click here to enter text.

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FIREARMS/WEAPONS			
Risk Factor	Y/N	Suggested Controls	Risk-specific Tips
Are their firearms/weapons in the home?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Contact supervisor and if necessary consider consulting police - do not enter dwelling <input type="checkbox"/> No - Proceed with client care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure firearms are stored in a locked cupboard and ammunition stored separately</li> <li>• Inform client/family that service will be withheld until firearms are stored, unloaded and in locked cupboard</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<a href="#">D2: Tips for When a Weapon is Involved</a> Click here to enter text.
COGNITIVE ABILITY			
Risk Factors	Y/N	Suggested Controls	Risk-specific Tips
Is the client able to direct their own care?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Continue to provide client care <input type="checkbox"/> No - Contact supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve family and make aware of community resources</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<a href="#">A1: Client Communication Tips</a> <a href="#">E1: Point-of-Care Staff Work Practice Assessment</a> Click here to enter text.
Is the client refusing to accept care?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Contact supervisor <input type="checkbox"/> No - Continue to provide client care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider inter-professional referral</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS			
Risk Factor	Y/N	Suggested Controls	Risk-specific Tips
Has a behavioral assessment such as the VAT been conducted and documented to determine the client's risk for violent, aggressive, or responsive behaviour?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No- Complete the VAT at the first point of contact		<a href="#">A1: Communicating with Potentially Violent Clients</a> <a href="#">A2: Terminating an Interaction with an Angry Client</a> <a href="#">A3: Guidelines for Non-verbal Behavior and Communication</a>
Is the client and/or family member(s) exercising or threatening to exercise physical force?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Leave the home and contact 911 immediately; contact supervisor <input type="checkbox"/> No - Continue to provide client care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update VAT when safe to do so and communicate risk to all caregivers (See SASWH's ICRA and Flagging Toolkit)</li> <li>• Alert supervisor of potential or an identified problem</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<a href="#">D1: Personal Attack Tips</a> <a href="#">E1: Point-of-Care Staff Work Practice Assessment</a> <a href="#">E2: Client Aggressions Risk Factors</a> Click here to enter text.
Is of the client exhibiting responsive behaviors to communicate unmet needs such as anxiety, pain, invasion of personal space, change in routine and noise while delivering care?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Maintain your personal space. Leave the home immediately and contact supervisor If there is imminent threat of danger, <input type="checkbox"/> No - Continue to provide client care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update VAT when safe to do so</li> <li>• Alert services of potential/identified problems</li> <li>• Limit number of care providers going into the home - consistency of caregivers is important</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	

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<p>Is the client and/or family member(s) showing signs of illegal drug use or drinking alcohol upon arrival??</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Do not enter home and/or leave the home immediately if illegal activities are occurring and contact supervisor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No - Continue to provide care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advise client/family that services may be withdrawn if identified risks occur during provision of care</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
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## Conclusion

Involving all workplace parties in the identification, assessment and control of the risk of violence will help to reduce the unpredictability of the community as a work environment and increase the safety of community workers.

With a better understanding of possible controls, an organization can develop customized assessment tools to further increase the value in conducting pre-visit, pre-travel and on-going hazard assessments. The end result will be a safer work environment, even when work is conducted in the community.

# Risk Specific Guidelines and Tips

## Client Communication

### A1: Communicating with Potentially Violent/Aggressive Clients

#### Verbal Communication

Talking can defuse anger. Here are some strategies to use when speaking with someone who is angry:

- Make your first contact neutral or non-directive: for example, ask how you can help. This inquiry communicates a sense of normal interaction.
- Focus your attention on the other person to let them know you are interested in what they have to say.
- Maintain a calm and reassuring demeanor. Try to calm the other person – DO NOT allow the other person’s anger to become your anger.
- Always be courteous to clients despite their behaviour. Introduce yourself and call them by name.
- Remain conscious of how you are delivering your words, and how receptive your body language and posture is.
- Use empathy – acknowledge the client’s feelings – confirm that you know they are upset.
- Use active listening skills. Do not interrupt.
- Confirm your understanding of the issue or problem by repeating what the client has told you.
- Acknowledge the client’s feelings and concerns.
- Use simple language; avoid jargon or technical language.
- Speak slowly, quietly and confidently.
- Remain open-minded, objective, and non-judgmental.
- Encourage the person to talk and express themselves as this will assist in decreasing their tension. DO NOT tell the person to relax, chill or calm down.
- Always be honest. Do not make promises that you cannot keep.
- Keep the client’s attention focused on the current issue.
- Use silence as a calming tool.
- Always attempt to explain delays or long waiting periods. Not doing so can be construed as discourtesy.
- Be prepared to apologize as necessary and accept criticism positively.

- Avoid giving commands.
- Look for ways to help the person save face.
- In a calm and non-threatening way, explain that violence is unacceptable and is not tolerated.
- If you feel threatened, politely and calmly terminate the interaction.

### **Body Language**

Employees must pay close attention to the body language of a potentially violent client. A hostile stance increases tension and interferes with verbal communication. When approaching an angry person:

- Stand about one metre (three feet) away (generally, this distance is outside the individual's personal space), on an angle (as opposed to directly in front of the person) and on the person's non-dominant side (people usually wear watches and part hair on the non-dominant side). Place yourself so that you have a clear exit.
- Avoid pointing or gesturing; make no sudden movements, avoid touching the person, avoid staring eye contact.
- Use calm body language: hands open, attentive facial expression, relaxed posture.
- Position yourself on the same physical level; avoid standing over the person.

## **A2: Terminating an Interaction with an Angry Client**

If you feel threatened, or if the interaction is increasing a client's anger, respectfully terminate the interaction immediately.

- Call the police.
- Calmly but politely interrupt the conversation.
- Document the incident.
- Either leave or ask the person to leave.
- If the person does not leave, inform a manager or supervisor immediately.
- If you threaten to call the police, be prepared to call them.
- Tell the person that the conversation is over.
- Use personal safety response systems such as personal alarms and mobile phones.

### **A3: Guidelines for Non-verbal Behaviour and Communication**

- Use calm body language – relaxed posture with hands unclenched, above waist and visible.
- Have an attentive expression on your face.
- Arrange yourself so your exit is not blocked.
- Position yourself at an angle rather than directly in front of the other person (Supportive Stance – protects vital organs and less confrontational, easier to get away).
- Give the person enough physical space. This varies by culture and other factors but normally two to four feet is considered adequate space.
- Document the incident.
- Activate personal safety response system as necessary. Inform the supervisor and either the supervisor or employee should call the police and report the incident. Threats of violence are illegal under the Criminal Code section 264.1 – Uttering Threats. The police will provide you with a case number and speak to the offender.

### **A4: Guidelines for Telephone Threats**

- If client is abusive, explain that their language is not acceptable and that you will terminate the call unless they refrain from such behaviour.
- Be firm and consistent.
- Hang up if necessary.
- Try to avoid taking the situation personally.
- If you receive a threatening phone call and know the person, let them know their behaviour is not acceptable and end the call.
- If you receive a threatening phone call and don't know the person, take notes on everything said and observations about background noise, voice characteristics, etc.

## Travel in the Community

### B1: Planning Travel

Whether travelling by car or public transit, workers are responsible for planning ahead:

- Get to know the area, particularly the safe area in the district.
- Plan the route and method of travel well in advance. Have insurance if travelling by car.
- Keep pertinent telephone numbers (destination, taxi service, hotel, rental car agency, reliable tow truck company, etc.) handy.
- Wear comfortable, conservative clothing and shoes with non-skid soles. Do not wear expensive jewelry or show large amounts of money. Religious symbols should be worn discreetly. Avoid earrings or accessories that could be grasped or pulled by another person.
- Avoid driving in isolated or dangerous areas. Plan the safest route to and from the client's home, even if it isn't the most direct. If travelling through dangerous areas is unavoidable, travel with a companion and note nearby police stations, public telephones and other public buildings such as hospitals and restaurants or stores that remain open late. If possible, arrive during daylight hours.
- Carry a cell phone, personal alarm and consider safety features in vehicles such as automatic locks and alarms. Do not wear headphones, for example, as they will limit your ability to hear sounds around you. Always be aware of your surroundings.
- Keep money in an accessible pocket to eliminate searching through a purse or wallet.
- Advise your office when you arrive.

### B2: Travelling by Public Transit

- Walk confidently with head erect.
- Keep an up-to-date transit schedule in an easy-to-access location.
- Have the exact change ready in a pocket. Avoid opening your purse or wallet.
- If possible, travel during the day.
- Always wait at a designated transit stop. Stand with a group of people rather than alone.
- Avoid isolated or poorly lit bus stops.
- Plan to arrive time at the transit stop just before your bus/streetcar does.

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- On the bus or streetcar, try to sit where you can see your upcoming stop as you approach. If you see suspicious or menacing individuals at your stop, get off at the next stop.
- When stepping off the bus, check to see if you are being followed. If you are, walk directly and quickly – without running or looking back – to a service station or store. Call 911.
- If possible, plan to have someone meet you at your home bus stop.
- Stand away from the edge of the subway platform and use the alarms in the subway, bus, streetcar as necessary.
- Stand or sit near the driver or streetcar operator or in the Designated Waiting Area of the subway platform.
- If someone is bothering you, or if you feel threatened, let the driver know immediately.
- Move instantly if jostled – it helps to foil pickpockets.
- Always be aware of your surroundings.
- Avoid direct eye contact with other travelers and do not participate in lengthy conversations with people in the street.
- If taking a taxi, check that the driver's identification and photo are clearly displayed and match the driver.
- Sit behind the front passenger seat.
- State the route you prefer, sticking to the main streets. State that someone is waiting for you.
- If you become uneasy with the driver, request that he or she pull over and let you out.

### **B3: Walking in the Community**

- Walking with your head erect, appearing alert and, scanning your route, proceed directly and quickly to the client's home.
- Use the main entrance as much as possible – avoid rear or secluded entrances.

## Safe Driving

### C1: Travelling by Car

Staff should be responsible for ensuring that their cars are road-ready by servicing them regularly (e.g. every six months). They are also responsible for employing safe driving practices, such as getting snow tires in winter or using four-wheel drive in the north.

#### Vehicle Checklist

- Use steel-belted radial tires to reduce the chance of a flat tire and keep the tires properly inflated.
- Check windshield wiper fluid level, battery and lights.
- Keep the gas tank more than half full at all times.

WINTER CAR SURVIVAL KIT	
<i>In the trunk:</i>	<i>In the car:</i>
<p>Should contain, but limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Axe or hatchet</li> <li>• Booster cables</li> <li>• Cloth or paper towels</li> <li>• Compass</li> <li>• Emergency food pack</li> <li>• Extra clothing/footwear</li> <li>• Fire extinguisher</li> <li>• Ice scraper and brush</li> <li>• Matches, survival candle in a deep can</li> <li>• Methyl hydrate (for fuel line and windshield de-icing)</li> <li>• Road maps</li> <li>• Sand, salt or kitty litter</li> <li>• Shovel</li> <li>• Tow chain</li> <li>• Traction mats or “ladder”</li> <li>• Warning light or road flares</li> <li>• Safety vest</li> <li>• Work gloves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flashlight</li> <li>• First-aid kit</li> <li>• Survival blanket</li> <li>• “Call Police” sign: durable, reflective plastic sign that hooks on the window and is visible from both directions at any time during any weather</li> </ul>

## C2: Safe Driving Practices

- Always approach your car with your car keys already in hand. Hold one key between your thumb and first finger so that the key can be used to as a weapon to protect yourself. Having your keys in your hand also allows you to quickly enter your car.
- In above-ground parking lots, park in well-lit areas near the main entrance or exit to the building.
- In underground parking lots, back into the parking space so you can leave the parking lot area quickly and safely.
- Check underneath the vehicle as you approach to make sure no one is hiding there, then check the back seat before getting into your car. If you notice someone near, at or in your vehicle, go to a safe area and contact security or the police.
- Keep the car doors locked and the windows closed when parking.
- Keep the doors locked when travelling in your car.
- Always use seat belts.
- Refrain from using the cell phone while driving. Pull off the road to make a call and limit phone use to emergencies.
- Consider using a head set or speaker phone in the car.
- Refrain from smoking in the car. Cigarette smoke leaves a film on windows and nicotine and carbon monoxide can reduce night vision.
- Do not wear sunglasses at night: they do not reduce headlight glare.
- Switch from high beams to low during night driving when within 150 m (500 feet) of an oncoming vehicle, or approaching within 60 m (200 feet) of turns and the crest of hills on country roads.
- Develop a routine for looking ahead, from side to side and in the rear view mirror.
- Check mirrors every five to 10 seconds and always before stopping or changing lanes.
- Always check blind spots by turning your head when changing lanes.
- Move away from drivers who are moving erratically.
- In traffic queues, stop when you can still see the wheels of the car ahead. At that distance, you can always get your car out of the queue and you have a buffer if hit from behind.
- Keep your foot firmly on the brake when you are stopped.
- If you suspect that you are being followed, note the car's license number and go immediately to a police, fire or service station. Do not leave the car, but honk your horn repeatedly until someone responds. Do not go home.

- If you are driving to a client's home, avoid parking directly in front of the home. Park next door so that you can see the front and sides of the dwelling as you approach.
- Roll up the windows and lock the car.
- Do not leave personal or nursing items visible.
- Leave purses at home and carry identification and money in front pockets.
- Post a sign on the dashboard stating that no drugs or equipment are inside the car.
- Park in open areas.
- Avoid underground parking garages. But, if you must use one, park near an exit in a well-lit area.
- Back into the parking spot and take a few minutes to observe the surroundings.
- Avoid parking beside a van or other large vehicle where you could be wedged in.
- If your car breaks down, try to get it to the side of the road. Put on the emergency flashers. Do not get out of the car. Keep the doors locked and the windows closed. Use your cell phone to call for assistance. If you do not have a cell phone, place a "Call Police" sign on the windshield.
- If someone other than a police officer comes to the car to assist you, open the window no more than 2 cm (1 inch) to speak to them.
- Do not accept help from a stranger. Ask the person to call the police or a towing service.

### **C3: What to Do if Confronted by an Aggressive Driver**

- Avoid eye contact and refrain from exchanging words or gestures and from retaliatory driving manoeuvres.
- Stay in control. Allow the driver to pass. Drop back and let them get far ahead.
- If pursued, go directly to a nearby safe area or police station.
- Use a cell phone to call for help.

## **C4: Parking Your Vehicle**

- If possible, park on the premises rather than on the street.
- Walk confidently with head up and be aware of your surroundings.
- Park as close to the home/building as possible, especially during the evening or night.
- Know where emergency telephones are.
- Look around before leaving your vehicle.
- Avoid leaving valuables inside your vehicle.
- Avoid locking your purse in the trunk of your vehicle while on site (lock it in the trunk before you arrive).
- Use the main entrance; avoid rear or secluded entrances.
- Put your keys in your hand before leaving the home/building and carry a whistle or another type of personal alarm.
- If you notice someone loitering near your vehicle, do not go to your vehicle; go to a safe area and contact the police.
- When approaching your vehicle, check underneath from a distance to ensure no one is hiding there or behind the vehicle.
- Look inside your vehicle before getting in.
- Once inside your vehicle, lock all doors and keep all windows up.

## **C5: Returning to Your Vehicle**

- Prepare yourself to leave the client's home with everything you need, such as the key to open your vehicle, and a whistle or other personal alarm.
- Use the main entrance as much as possible — avoid rear or secluded exits.
- Scan the area for suspicious or menacing individuals. Have a back-up plan if there is danger.
- Walk with your head erect, appear alert and, scan your route, and proceed directly and quickly to your vehicle.
- Once you are in your vehicle, ensure all doors are locked and windows are up.

## Personal Threats and Attacks

### D1: Personal Attack Tips

- Make a scene, yell or scream as loud as possible – shout words like STOP! HELP! FIRE! Run to a nearby store or the nearest well-lit area and continue calling for help.
- If you are being pulled or dragged along, fall to the ground and roll.
- Blow a whistle, activate a personal alarm or activate a fire alarm or any other device that would create a scene.
- If you are in a public area, give bystanders specific instructions to help you. Single someone out and send them for help, e.g. “You in the yellow shirt, call the police!”
- If someone grabs your purse, briefcase or other belongings, DO NOT resist. Throw the item to the ground several feet away from the thief and run in the opposite direction yelling HELP! DO NOT chase the thief.
- Call the police immediately after any incident (when it is safe to do so) and report the appearance and mannerisms of the offender.

### D2: Tips for When a Weapon is Involved

- Never try to disarm an armed Individual. If possible, try to leave the location and call 911.
- Never accept a weapon from an upset, agitated individual; the person may change their mind and turn the weapon on you. Ask them to set it down on the floor or counter.
- Use personal safety response systems – e.g. personal alarms and mobile phones
- If you are assaulted, call 911 as soon as it is safe to do so.
- Report the incident to your supervisor as soon as possible
- Write down your recollection of the incident as soon as possible to assist the police or hospital staff with details
- After a traumatic incident, seek support and/or counselling (through the internal debriefing process or the employee and family assistance program)

## Client Care

### E1: Point-of-care Staff Work Practice Assessment

Caregivers can avert client aggression/violence by means of their approach to care. Persons with cognitive impairment, dementia, physiological and psychiatric illness may not be able to communicate their needs verbally. It is imperative that caregivers constantly assess the client’s needs and ensure that the care they provide is person-centred. All clients should be treated with dignity and respect, and should not be victimized as perpetrators of violent acts. If we strive to meet their needs and communicate appropriately, we can avert episodes of aggressive behaviours.

This tool will assist caregivers to reflect on caregiving safety measures and person-centred care strategies.

CONSIDERATIONS	YES/NO
Are the client’s wishes and needs considered when establishing a client care plan?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Does the client history include the likelihood of a client exhibiting violent, aggressive or responsive behaviour? (refer to SASWH’s ICRA & Flagging toolkit as needed)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Is there is a process to communicate the risk of violence e.g. flagging client charts who are assessed at-risk for violent, aggressive or responsive behaviour? Are such factors as personality, medications, type or degree of illness and history considered?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Is client confidentiality balanced with employee safety?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Does the organization support a flexible care plan designed to meet the needs of your clients?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Are there certain client care activities that must be performed at a specific time of day?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Is a standard assessment conducted on clients to determine the likelihood and triggers of violent, aggressive, or responsive behaviour?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Is staff safety considered when designing a client care plan?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you explain to a client what you are going to do and how you are going to do it each time you engage in a client care activity?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Is the client kept informed about treatment, procedures and care planning?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Are the client's privacy and dignity respected during care activities?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
When client assignments are being completed by one person working in isolation, can the job be done more safely with two people working together?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Are clients' scheduled appointments kept promptly?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff educated in recognizing escalating behaviour and patterns of violence?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff educated in effective communication techniques?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff know how to respond when confronted by a violent or aggressive client or family member(s)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff know how to access help quickly?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Is there is an effective emergency response mechanism that staff can readily access to summon immediate help in an emergency situation (i.e., use of cell phone; immediate exit)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Can staff review a client's profile before meeting with that client?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Are regular case management meetings held with all staff who are directly or indirectly involved in the care of potentially violent clients?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Are ways to deal with violent or aggressive clients discussed and client care plans updated to indicate factors that trigger violence and suggest controls?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff who are more experienced or staff who have a demonstrated ability to handle potentially violent situations assigned to high-risk areas or to high-risk clients?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Before approaching a client, do you make sure that the lighting is adequate?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Are a comfortable temperature and low noise levels are maintained?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
If clients resist or become hostile during care, is the care stopped immediately?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
If you feel threatened in any way during client care, is there a process to request the presence of another staff member?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

## E2: Client Aggression Risk Factors

This tool will assist caregivers to identify risk factors associated with violent or aggressive behaviour

- Language or cultural barriers
- Diagnosis (psychogeriatric illness, mental illness, medical condition)
- Poverty
- Fear
- Loss of control
- Loneliness
- Frustration
- Boredom
- Effects of medications or lack of medication
- Anniversary of a significant event
- Losses (friends, family, no support system)
- Lack of information
- Time of day or week (“sundown syndrome”)
- Task too complicated
- Physiological needs (fatigue, hunger, need to void)
- Reaction to race and sex of caregiver





## **Assessing Violence in the Community: A Handbook for the Workplace**

SASKATCHEWAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
**SAFE WORKPLACES**  
IN HEALTH

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